

Opening Statement of Chairman Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“Oversight of the Department of Health and Human Services”
February 15, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Secretary Azar, welcome to Energy and Commerce. On behalf of all of us, I'd like to congratulate you again on your confirmation as the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Your previous leadership experience at the department and in the private sector will give you a tremendous springboard to do great work for the American people.

We appreciate you appearing before the subcommittee today so shortly after your confirmation.

Energy and Commerce has led the way in delivering meaningful health care reforms and policies for the American people. Last year, we completed our work to spur new innovation and competition in the life sciences sector through the FDA Reauthorization Act. Ensuring and strengthening American's leadership role in biotechnology to help consumers will continue to be a priority for this committee.

We also just enacted the longest extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program, critical extensions of Medicare extenders that seniors rely upon, and strengthened public health by providing funding for community health centers and other important public health priorities. We also rolled back the Affordable Care Act's Independent Payment Advisory Board – which threatened to undermine care for our nation's seniors who rely upon the Medicare program. We did this all in a fiscally responsible way by doing the hard work of ensuring new spending was fully paid for with targeted and smart reductions in health spending.

These priorities and others were part of 19 Energy and Commerce Committee bills that were signed into law by President Trump as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018.

Secretary Azar, we had a chance to talk earlier this week about our shared priorities and we look forward to partnering with you and the entire Department of Health and Human Services. This committee has a rich tradition of bipartisan oversight and legislative work – and I see a lot of opportunity for us to continue down that path in the coming weeks and months.

Particularly, I see a great opportunity to for us to work together to combat the

opioid crisis, a top priority for me and for this committee. We need to build upon E&C's previous legislative efforts, namely the Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act (CARA) and the funding provided in the 21st Century Cures Act. While these laws resulted in record amounts of federal resources being devoted to this fight, more is needed to address this growing crisis. In last week's budget bill, we were able to deliver headroom to provide new resources to combat the opioid crisis for the rest of FY 2018 and FY 2019. We look forward to working with our friends at the Appropriations Committee on this point.

Last year, we held a Member Day to solicit solutions to help combat the opioid crisis – hearing directly from members both on and off this committee, Republican and Democrat. Later this month, this subcommittee will launch its review of targeted solutions to help combat the opioid crisis. This work will be done in tandem with our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee work led by Chairman Harper.

Given that addressing the opioid epidemic has bipartisan interest and with President Trump's leadership and commitment to this issue, it is my hope and belief that this committee will deliver additional legislative solutions that we can move to the full House later this year.

The Health Subcommittee also plans to build upon the work of our Oversight and Investigations work regarding the 340B program. This important program designed to serve low-income individuals has essentially not been modernized in more than two decades. It is my belief that reforms are necessary to strengthen and secure the program so it can best serve low-income populations access affordable medications. We look forward to working with HHS and stakeholders to make sure we get the job done right.

Along with finding opportunities to lower costs for consumers across the board and the addressing reauthorizations later this year, 2018 will be a busy year for this subcommittee.

Secretary Azar, we look forward to partnering with you on these initiatives and working on many of our shared priorities together.